

CHAPTER IV

PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS IN ASSAM

Since the inauguration of provincial autonomy under the Act of 1935 political developments in Assam led to the emergence of an immigrant lobby. In course of time it became a powerful force under the leadership of Abdul Hamid Khan popularly known as Bhasani. The question of land settlements with the immigrants and the policy of Line System in the post 1937 period became a source of constant friction between the two political parties namely Muslim League and Congress with different motives. After the Muslim League's Lahore Resolution on 23rd March, 1940, the Two Nations Theory became the focal point of Indian politics. In Assam it got mixed up with the immigrant issue. The land settlement policy of Saadulla's successive cabinet since 1940 was considered by both the Congress and the Hindu masses as an attempt to facilitate Assam's inclusion in Pakistan. On the other hand, the Bardoloi Ministry's policy of eviction of immigrants in 1946 was strongly opposed by Muslim League, who launched a Civil Disobedience movement against the Government to reverse it. The League's agitation against eviction policy soon became a battle cry for the state of Pakistan which divided Assam on communal lines.

Another dimension of the immigrant problem was the language issue. Earlier, the Bengali Muslim immigrants were willing to identify themselves with the Assamese people, but after 1937 they began to assert themselves as Bengali. This partly led to the conflicts. The Assamese Hindus became afraid of their linguistic identity. They voiced that if mass immigration was not stopped and Sylhet was separated from Assam they would not be able to protect themselves from dominance of Bengali language. It should be mention that both the community Bengali and Assamese had already divided

linguistically and valley wise. Also with the influx of immigrants and the increase of Bengali speaking people it became a major concern of the Assamese people. Slowly it became a burning issue for the Assamese people who wanted to carve out a linguistically more homogenous province. Finally it ended up with cessation of Sylhet from Assam by Referendum offered by Mountbatten in 1947.

Before 1937, the Muslim League had not much influence in the politics of Assam. League politics began in Assam following the All India Muslim League session of 1937 and particularly after the establishment of the League branches in the Brahmaputra valley. As the Lahore Resolution demanding the creation of a Muslim homeland called Pakistan was passed, its echo was heard in Assam. When Maulana Bhasani became the President of the Muslim League in Assam in April 1944 the movement for inclusion of Assam in Pakistan acquired a new dimension. The problem of Muslim immigrants in Assam accelerated the movement and intensified the hostility towards the Line System as a part of the battle cry for Pakistan.¹

With the reconstitution of the Saadulla Ministry on the basis of the Tripartite Agreement of 22nd March, 1945 some modifications in the land settlement was made. The resolution that was issued on 13 July, 1945 despite the opposition of the Provincial League Working Committee and the League nominees in the reconstituted Saadulla ministry was very significant as it completely superseded all previous resolutions on land settlement. Three main issues received priority in the resolution which were

- 1) The protection of tribals,
- 2) The clearance of professional grazing reserves,
- 3) The planned settlement of land after providing for the tribals and the indigenous population.²

¹Bimal J.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri. *The Line System in Assam: A Study of the Rule of Moulana Bhasani*, JASB, Vol. XXIII No. 2, Dhaka, 1978. p.75

² *Ibid.*p.76

In pursuance of the resolution of July, eviction operations were started by the Saadulla Ministry under the inspiration of Revenue Minister Rohini Kumar Choudhury. Accordingly unauthorized encroachers from Doconia, Bhangamari, Kurishamari, and Laheswari reserves in Kamrup district were cleared. But during the election campaign in late November, 1945 the eviction operation was stopped.³

The election of 1946 witnessed the emergence of first Congress Cabinet in Assam. The Congress ministries under Bardoloi came to office on 11 February, 1946 and decided to act on lines previously agreed by the Coalition Ministry under Muhammad Saadulla in 1945. The Government issued instructions under earlier resolution to all unauthorized and unprotected encroachers from the professional reserves except those who had been in occupation of land in the reserve since 1938 or earlier.⁴ The ministry, however were also prepared to make concession in favour of those immigrants who lost their land due to military acquisition and river erosion.⁵ The operation started with the eviction of fifty four families of Champapathar Pukuripar area near Gauhati.

The Muslim League strongly opposed the Government's eviction policy, who thought that the eviction programme would serve as a signal for trouble in the province. The Muslim League denied the Congress Ministry's claim that they were following the policy of the last Muslim League ministry, which decided not to evict any person from professional grazing reserves who had sown at least one crop there. The Muslim League also denied that fresh immigrants were coming to Assam and asserted that the problem was purely economic and political.⁶

In the first session of Provincial Legislative Assembly the Muslim League members criticized the Congress Government's policy of eviction and alleged that the eviction policy was carried indiscriminately without even sparing the legitimate holders

³ *Ibid.*p.78

⁴ *Ibid.*p.78

⁵ ASF File No.119/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI p.47

⁶ *Ibid.*p.49

of the land. It was ruthless in its operation and adopted at a time of extreme scarcity of food crops and famine condition. It was primarily aimed against Muslim immigration with the motive of exterminating them from the province. They also alleged that all restrictions under Line System were oppressive, inhuman and illegal and must be abolished. Such policy might continue in undivided India and so the only remedy all the evils therefore lay in the creation of Pakistan.⁷

In the Assam Legislative Assembly on March, 1946, Abdul Bari Choudhury raised a discussion on the land settlement policy of the Government. He said that the Line System was an artificial barrier by which British Indian subjects had been denied the right of settlement on British Indian country. He, therefore, proposed that unprofitable Forest Reserves should be thrown open for cultivation and Professional Grazing Reserves which were not actually used for grazing purpose should also be thrown open for cultivation.⁸

Participating in the debate in the Assembly Beliram Das accused Jinnah for his demand for inclusion of Assam in the eastern zone of his proposed Pakistan which complicated to a great extent the land settlement problem in Assam, though it was purely an economic one. He also complained that to fulfill political design, Pakistan officers, who were officially known as Colonization Officers were appointed in Darrang, Kamrup and Nowgong, by previous Muslim League Government under the pretext of the Colonization Scheme, who were actually promoting the cause of Pakistan. Under the plea of Grow More Food Campaign valuable lands including professional reserves and game sanctuaries, which were necessary for the existence of Assamese people, had been thrown open for the settlement of immigrants. He also alleged that what the Mughals could not achieve with the vast armies and resources in the past had been achieved by the League Ministry within a span of a few years. Assam's land settlement

⁷ M.Kar.*op.cit.*, p.86

⁸ N.Dhar. *op.cit.*, p.173

problem was nothing but an attempt by the League Ministers to convert Assam into Muslim majority province with a motive to include her in the Eastern zone of Pakistan.⁹

In justification of his allegation Beliram Das referred to a speech of Maulavi Abdul Rauf, leader of the immigrant Muslims, delivered as Chairman of the Reception Committee of the League meeting presided over by Choudhury Khaliquzzaman held at Barpeta on 7th and 8th March, 1944. The speech sufficiently cleared the facts and designs of Muslim League for the inclusion of Assam in the eastern zone of Pakistan. Moreover the League propagandists demanded Assam in the map of Pakistan on the ground that Muslims were majority in Assam and non-Muslims in Assam were Tribals. This claim of the League was based on the Census of 1941 where tea garden labourers were shown as Tribals, where as in the previous Census nearly 14 Lakhs of such labourers were shown as Hindus. Therefore, it was a folly on the part of the League Ministry to enumerate the labourers as Tribals to reduce the number of Hindu population.¹⁰

Beliram Das also supported the view of Finance Minister that 160 thousand bighas of lands in the grazing reserves were settled with the immigrants by the last League Ministry. According to him, in the district of Nowgong alone about 50,000 bighas of lands of Burbandha, Borghuli,Laokhowaetc had been settled by the last League Ministry,with the people among whom 95% were Muslims.¹¹

Syed Abdur Rauf was of the view that it was the high caste Assamese Hindu Officers and the leaders who encouraged the people to sell lands to the immigrants and secretly created evil and cruel designs against the immigrants. He alleged that after receiving lakhs of rupees from immigrants, they were deprived of thousand bighas of land which they had purchased. He also made it clear that the immigrants had never agreed to any term of agreement in connection to land settlement and so that agreement had no moral sanction against it. According to him, when the country was faced with an

⁹ *Assam Gazette*.part.VI A,p.98

¹⁰ *Ibid*.p.99

¹¹ *Ibid*.p.100

impending famine, the eviction of people would mean their complete annihilation. Rouf warned the Congress Government against consequences of the eviction policy and advised the people to prepare themselves for welcoming martyrs' fate.¹²

Mayeen Uddin Ahmed Choudhury complained that the Government did not even enquire before including any particular area in Professional Grazing Reserves. As within a radius of over 5 miles of the village Pukaripar, not a single village or house of any grazier was there. The vast areas on all sides of that village were lying waste except only a small portions cultivated by Muslims.¹³

He also argued that it was far from the truth to say that due to the demand of Muslim League to include Assam in Pakistan there had been an onrush of immigrants. He said that 99% of the immigrant Muslims had come to Assam long before 1940, the year in which the All India Muslim League adopted the Pakistan resolution.¹⁴

Abdul Hamid on the question of immigration said that eviction was carried on under rule 18 of the Settlement Rules of Land Revenue Regulation. It gave power of summary ejection only from the village grazing reserves and wastelands but not from grazing grounds, from where the largest number of villagers was being evicted. No Government has the right to drive out from their existence without starting any legal proceedings against them. He called it a barbarous method.¹⁵

Participating in the debate in the Assembly, Abdul Matin Choudhury asked that what part Assam was going to play or what contribution the Congress Government was going to make in saving the lives of hundreds and thousands of people who might be affected by the famine in the near future. He said that there were million acres of lands lying fallow within the province and hundreds and thousands of landless people were ready to undertake cultivation of all these lands and produce food crops which could save the lives of the people in the areas affected by the famines. But the Line system

¹² N.Dhar.p.167

¹³ *Ibid.*p.169

¹⁴ *Assam Gazette*.part.VI A.p.103

¹⁵ *Ibid.*p.108

prohibited the landless people from cultivation of Government wastelands and producing crops.¹⁶ On the basis of Desai's report he said that there were lakhs of bighas of surplus Professional Grazing Reserves in Barpeta, Gauhati, Mangaldoi, Tezpur, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. In view of the nature of eviction, he refused to extend any cooperation which the Revenue Minister sought from the leaders of all parties in the work of eviction of encroachers.¹⁷

Omeo Kumar Das stated that the problem was an economic one. He reminded the House of the Assembly that Saadulla, the previous Premier had entered into an agreement with the opposition after many conferences. But some of the members involved in that discussion were now opposing the agreement. The Bardoloi Government did not want to deviate from the policy enunciated in the Resolution of 13th July, 1945. Finally, the motion was defeated by 59 votes against 28 votes. All the Muslim members present there voted for and all other members, including the Christians and Abdul Matlib Mazumder voted against it.¹⁸

Premier Bardoloi stood firm and declared that the Congress Government were doing nothing new but following an agreement reached during the Muslim League Ministry of Saadulla. Moreover the Bardoloi complained that large scale encroachments of government reserve lands and other lands were going on under the inspiration and guidance of the Muslim League. Evictions were thus necessary to maintain government authority by punishing encroachers.¹⁹

In the meantime taking up the cause of landless immigrants, the Working Committee of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, met at Gauhati on 8th March, 1946 to consider the situation arising out of threat of mass eviction of immigrants. It resolved to constitute a committee consisting of Maulana Bhasani, Saadulla, Abdul Motin Choudhury, Abdur Rauf etc to meet the situation. It also resolved to challenge the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,p.111

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ N.Dhar.*op.cit.*,p.183

¹⁹ M.Kar.*op.cit.*,p.87

legality of the Line system. The Committee decided to advise the landless and evicted persons to spread out and cultivate all surplus cultivable Government wastelands to produce food crops to save themselves and thousand others from miseries of famines, starvation and death.²⁰

On 15th March, Abdul Hamid Khan (Maulana Bhasani) distributed a pamphlet in Bengali in various parts of Assam by exaggerating the issue of eviction which declared that 1, 50,000 Muslims were victimized in the process of eviction. According to Government's estimate the number of persons to be evicted was 15,000 only. In the pamphlet he complained that many old settlers living there for ten to fifteen years were also evicted and police atrocities caused the destruction and looting of essential articles of the evictees.²¹ As a result the Revenue Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi wanted to initiate legal action against the Bhasani for spreading false news and rumors. Later on the matter was dropped.²²

The matter of eviction had already attracted the attention of Jinnah and All India Muslim League. During his visit to Assam in 1946, he took up the cause of Muslim immigrants and warned the Congress Government to reverse its policy of eviction of Muslim settlers, or a situation would be created which would not be conducive to the people of Assam. It should be mentioned that in the All India Muslim legislator's Convention held at Delhi in April 1946 the demand for inclusion of Assam in the map of Pakistan was made. On the other hand, the All India Muslim League Council which met after Convention demanded the immediate withdrawal of the invidious and illegal Line system prevailing in Assam.²³

In the meantime the clearing of encroachers from the grazing reserves in Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong and Sibsagar districts was started in May, 1946 but was suspended during the monsoon. All the encroachers were served a notice asking them

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.88

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Bimal J. Dev and Dilip K. Lahiri *op.cit.*, p.79

²³ M. Kar. *op.cit.*, p.89

to quit the reserve within fifteen days. However, a large number of immigrant families had, during the monsoon season entered the portions of the reserves cleared to hold trespassers. They entered the government reserve areas under the incitement of Muslim League. It further complicated the problem. The Congress ministry suspected that the main idea behind the influx of immigrants of a particular community was to increase the population of the community in the province. The Government already decided to prepare a two year plan for ordered settlement on arable wastelands in the province. In that direction a special officer had been appointed to find the exact area of such lands. It was decided that the lands would be distributed to the immigrants as per plan chalked of the government but after due reservation for the needs of the indigenous population.²⁴

With the advent of monsoon eviction was temporarily suspended from June 1, 1948. But the Muslim League was not satisfied either by assurance or by the suspension. Therefore the Muslim League Council deputed Abdur Rouf, MLA to report on evictions. Rouf gave harrowing tales of police and military atrocities on evictions. Bhasani began fast unto death at a place called Chakrivita, an immigrant village adjacent to Barpeta town against the alleged evictions in Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong. After several efforts from many quarters Bhasani broke his fast after sixty one days.²⁵

It should be noted here that the All India Jamiat-ul-Ulema dispatched a deputation to Assam to investigate the matter of eviction and accordingly Muhammed Mian Nazim, Hakim Muhammed Zaman and Dr. Mahmud Murtaza, Jamiat members toured Mangaldai, Barpeta and other places. They submitted their report on July 1946 where they stated that it was Saadulla Government who initiated eviction policy by removing many Muslim immigrants from several *mauzas* of Barpeta subdivision. Moreover, on 13th July 1945, the Muslim League Government issued instructions to the Commissioners to hold any grain found in the fields after 30th September, 1945. They also instructed to demolish without notice the houses of immigrants in those areas from where they had been evicted earlier. Now the Muslim League members changed their

²⁴ ASF File No.11/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI p.48

²⁵ M.Kar.*op.cit*,p.90

stand as opposition and protested against the Congress Government, who was following the footsteps of last Saadulla ministry.²⁶

It may be noted here that along with land settlement problem in Assam, the Assamese leadership of the Congress in Assam was also faced with linguistic problem. As the prominent Muslim League leaders were from Sylhet and the Bengali identity of the immigrants were always asserted during the period of evictions, the Assamese leaders wanted to get rid of linguistic problem. So they very much favoured the idea of immediate transfer of Sylhet to Bengal which, culturally and linguistically was different from the Brahmaputra valley. Moreover, the Assamese Hindus demanded the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal on the ground that with Sylhet in Assam there could be no real self-government. They thought that financially, Sylhet was a permanently deficit district. The system of land tenure and civil court administration were different in Sylhet and the rest of Assam.²⁷

The people of Sylhet both Hindus and Muslims strongly opposed the transfer of Sylhet district of Bengal to Assam which was announced vide notification No 3343 and 2343 dated the 12th September, 1874. A memorandum was submitted to the Governor General, on behalf of the people of Sylhet protesting against the transfer and opposing amalgamation with Assam with whom they had no similarity, either socially or linguistically. The Colonial government at that time assured that no change would be made in the laws and institutions existing in Sylhet, but insisted that transfer was irreversible. The partition of Bengal (1905) placed Sylhet with the other Eastern Bengal provinces. But the annulment of Bengal Partition (1912) again brought Sylhet back to Assam, which was resented by the people of Sylhet. A Sylhet Bengal Reunion League was formed in 1920 to lead the movement for the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal. It decided to send a delegation to the Viceroy at his forthcoming visit to Assam. But as the Surma Valley Conference meanwhile adopted a resolution of non-cooperation which resolved

²⁶ ASF No.G-45 of 1946 p.8

²⁷BimalJ.Dev and Dilipk.Lahiri *op.cit.*,p.82

not to address Viceroy, the proposed deputation was cancelled and Reunion League was dissolved.²⁸

Efforts were made in the Legislative Council of Assam when Brojendra Narayan Choudhury, a Swarajit Hindu from the Surma Valley moved a resolution demanding transfer of Sylhet to Bengal in 1924. Earlier Kamini Kumar Chanda placed similar demand in the Imperial Council in 1918.²⁹The proposal of Brajendra Narayan Choudhury was later on amended to include the transfer of Cachar district also. The motion was carried by twenty two votes to eighteen. Almost all the Hindu members of the Assam Legislative Council supported transfer while the Muslims were equally divided. The debate on the issue clearly focused on valley divergences and opposite attitudes of Hindus and Muslims.³⁰

In July, 1926, Sadananda Dowerah, an Assamese member again moved a resolution in the Council demanding the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal without hampering the status and privileges of Assam, enjoying as a province. Saadulla, an Assamese Muslim member opposed the resolution as he apprehended that Assam minus Surma Valley would lose its status. He also cautioned that if it was allowed then similar moves might rise from Goalpara and other areas. Moreover, the transfer of Sylhet from Assam would be disastrous to the Muslims numerically. According to him, the Muslims constituted twenty eight percent of the total population of the province numbering 20, 28,341 against 37, 48,620 Hindus. According to him the Muslims were fourteen percent in the Brahmaputra valley and with the transfer of Sylhet from Assam, the number of Muslim population would sink into an ineffective minority. After transfer of Sylhet, the Muslims would be only 2, 78,460 against 26, 48,932 Hindus of the Brahmaputra valley.³¹ He suggested that the whole of Assam could be annexed to Bengal on the condition that Assamese culture and language would not be affected. In spite of

²⁸ ASF No.78 of 1945

²⁹Sajal Nag. *Roots of Ethnic Conflict : Nationality Qeuston in North East India*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1990, p.117

³⁰ M.kar.*op.cit.*p.116

³¹ M.Kar.*op.cit.*,p.124

opposition of Saadulla and other Muslim members the resolution was carried by 26 to 11 votes. But as soon as the resolution was passed a counter agitation was launched by the Muslims to oppose the transfer. The Surma Valley Political Conference rejected in July 1928 a resolution regarding Sylhet and Cachar's desire to be incorporated in Bengal by a good majority. In Sylhet district itself, protest meetings were held at various places opposing the transfer. In 1928, a resolution was moved by Muhammed Bhakt Mazumder opposing the transfer of Sylhet and Cachar. He was supported by Anjuman-i-Islamia and Muslim Students Association.³²

On the other hand, the Assamese legislators asserted that their support for transfer of Sylhet was not inspired by jealousy, but they felt that the progress of the Brahmaputra valley was being hampered by the presence of Sylhet in Assam.³³ The Government of Assam in their memorandum to the Simon Commission observed that the working of the Diarchy was hampered by racial lines of cleavages and division among the people of the two valleys.³⁴ In 1931, the Assam Political Conference held at Jorhat supported the demand for transfer of Sylhet.³⁵ In 1932, Rai Bahadur Nilambar Dutta of Brahmaputra valley proposed a resolution in the Council asking Assam Government to consider the transfer of Sylhet district to Bengal excluding Jaintia Parganas. The proposal was strongly opposed by Munwar Ali of Sylhet.³⁶

The Muslim opposition on the issue of transfer continued and in the first session of the Provincial Muslim League the transfer was opposed on the ground it would weaken the Muslim population of Assam to the extent of sixteen lakhs and which would affect the Muslim interest in Assam.³⁷ But with the declaration of Lahore Resolution of 1940, attitude changed and the Muslim League members of Saadulla cabinet now desired to incorporate Assam with Bengal with the aim creating North Eastern Zone of

³²S.Nag.*op.cit.*,p.125

³³ M.Kar.*op.cit.*, p.131

³⁴ *Ibid.*p.132

³⁵ *Ibid.*p.133

³⁶ *Ibid.*p.134

³⁷BimalJ.Dev and Dilipk.Lahiri *op.cit.*, p.83

Pakistan. The question of transfer figured prominently in course of debates on establishment of a High Court and a University in Assam. Surma valley opposed to both as they hoped that they would not be benefitted by its establishment in the Brahmaputra valley.³⁸

In fact, one of the factors which created jealousy between the two valleys was the superior position acquired by *Sylheti* people, particularly Hindus by virtue of an earlier progress of education. With the spread and progress of education among the Assamese, there grew a sense of importance for acquisition of official positions in the government services. But they found themselves in a great disadvantageous position. In the Eastern Bengal and Assam Legislative Council in 1909 it was Manik Chandra Barua, who raised the question of inadequacy of appointment of Assamese in various government services and demanded the greater representation of Assamese people on ground of academic attainments.³⁹

Finally, the issue of transfer was settled on the eve of independence through Mountbatten plan of referendum. Muslims of both valleys and the Assamese Hindus with few exceptions supported separation for various grounds.⁴⁰

The Colonial Government tried to maintain the balance between the two valleys through the allocation of public expenditure and Government jobs, which could not satisfy the Assamese middle class. Therefore, the major concern of the people of Brahmaputra valley was not the mal-distribution of power and resources between the two valleys but between two major linguistic groups- the Assamese and the Bengalese. The Bengalese had already acquired much larger share in the province and with the influx of immigrants from Bengal the Bengali speaking population went on increasing from census to census, which alarmed a major section of Assamese community.⁴¹

³⁸ M.Kar.*op.cit.*, p.136

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.141

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*p.136

⁴¹ A.Guha.*Planter Raj to Swaraj (Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics In Assam)*, New Delhi, ICHR, 1977, p.205

Table 4.1: Assamese and Bengali Speakers in the District of the Brahmaputra valley

District	Language	1911	1921	1931
Kamrup	Assamese	529,750(79.2%)	576,205(75.5%)	649,512(66.5%)
	Bengali	8,504(1.3%)	50,855(6.7%)	170,409(17.5%)
Goalpara	Assamese	85,239(14.2%)	138,810(18.2%)	161,179(18.3%)
	Bengali	347,772(57.8%)	405,710(53.2%)	476,433(54.0%)
Darrang	Assamese	166,988(44.4%)	175,865(36.6%)	193,736(32.9%)
	Bengali	57,986(15.4%)	86,680(18.0%)	95,535(17.2%)
Nowgong	Assamese	195,696(64.4%)	210,661(52.9%)	237,406(42.2%)
	Bengali	12,715(4.2%)	72,101(18.1%)	193,349(34.4%)
Sibsagar	Assamese	391,584(56.7%)	430,656(52.3%)	503,603(54.0%)
	Bengali	127,816(18.5%)	131,351(16.0%)	73,351(7.9%)
Lakhimpur	Assamese	158,535(38.8%)	187,379(29.8%)	236,933(30.4%)
	Bengali	76,436(16.3%)	100,073(16.9%)	78,699(10.1%)
Brahmaputra valley (Total)	Assamese	1,527,835(49.2%)	1,719,576(44.6%)	1,981,369(42.0%)
	Bengali	631,228 (21.0%)	852,700(22.1%)	1,087,776(23.0%)

(Sources: Impact of Immigration in Assam, 1871-1951 p.96-97)

Under the circumstances, the valley jealousy which was formerly limited to job seeking Assamese middle class was slowly being transformed into a linguistic nationalism. Moreover, most of the Goalpara zaminders identified themselves with Bengali culture and launched a movement for the transfer of Goalpara to Bengal after the First World War. Their demand continued throughout twenties and early thirties of the twentieth century. It was then the demand for restraint of further influx of East Bengal Muslim immigrants into Goalpara and the other districts of Brahmaputra valley which was gradually raised as a political issue. The Assamese middle class apprehended that if the immigration continues unrestrained, then the Assamese people would be turned into a linguistic minority. Therefore, the language issue became a major concern not only of the urban middle class but also to the peasant masses. Under such circumstances the public attention was focused on Line system, a device evolved by the Colonial officials in response of the immigration problem in 1920.⁴²

⁴² *Ibid.* p.206

After its status as a separate province in 1912, Assam began to press her demand as a major province under the reforms of 1919. Accordingly, the Assam Association, the Assam Chhatra Sanmilan and the Assam Sahitya Sabha began to articulate their unsettled quest for linguistic and regional identity in the Brahmaputra valley.⁴³ The publication of Census Report of 1931 by C.S Mullan aggravated the fear complex of Assamese people on issues of lands, jobs and medium of instruction in schools. In the Census Report Mullan prophesied that Sibsagar would ultimately remain the only district where an Assamese race would find a home of its own. The motivation was to set the Assamese and the Bengali immigrants against each other.⁴⁴

But The Governor Michael Keane rejected Mullan's observation as published in the Census report of 1931 in his address to the Assam Legislative Council. He said that the Assamese language showed a considerable increase in the number of its speakers namely from 1,726,000 to 1,995,000 or by 15.6 percent. According to him, Assamese was spoken almost entirely in the Assam Valley. Every district in that valley showed a substantial increase, the percentage being: Goalpara 16.1%, Kamrup 12.8%, Darrang 10.1%, Nowgong 12.7%, Sibsagar 16.9% and Lakhimpur 26.2%. Thus, in spite of large increase in the population of Assam at every census since 1901 the percentage of the speakers of Assamese to the total population of Assam remained very steady and there was no danger of supersession.⁴⁵

The Times of Assam, Dibrugarh of 25th February, 1933 reported that a deputation met Governor Michael Keane at Nowgong and pointed out that it would not be an easy task to Assamese to deal with immigrants so long as Sylhet was linked with Assam. The deputationists also urged that if the Government could not stop immigration into the province completely, then the immigrants from Bihar, U.P C.P and other provinces might be encouraged, who would not be a threat to the Assamese culture and

⁴³ N.Dhar *op.cit.*, p.153

⁴⁴ A.Guha.*op.cit.*,p.212

⁴⁵ ASF Revenue-B,June,1933 No.223

language. But they apprehended that a free immigration from Bengal would completely swallow up the province and would only help to make Assam a part of greater Bengal.⁴⁶

In 1937, Jnananath Bora, leading intellectual of the province by an article published in *Dainik Batori* from Jorhat, urged that unless Sylhet was separated, Assamese language was declared the only medium of instruction in schools and influx of Bengali settlers were stopped, it would be difficult for the Assamese to survive as nationality.⁴⁷

Again, when Jawaharlal Nehru came to Assam in November, 1937, Nilmoni Phukan and Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury on behalf of Asamiya Samrakshini Sabha submitted a memorandum complaining that Bengali Muslim immigrants, who were earlier willing to identify themselves with the Assamese people in matters of language and culture, now were being asked to read Bengali. They also urged that if Sylhet and Cachar plains were separated from the province and the mass immigration into the Brahmaputra valley were stopped, the Assamese people would be the staunchest supporter of the Congress.⁴⁸

It should be mentioned in all the Government schools of the Brahmaputra valley, both Bengali and Assamese students were imparted education through both the medium up to class VI and through the medium of English thereafter. Following Calcutta University's decision to introduce mother-tongue as medium of instruction in place of English in class VII-X at the high schools, the Assam Government decided in favour of unilingual schools. Accordingly, it encourages the setting up new aided schools exclusively for Bengali children. Earlier the Government aided Bengali medium sections were not provided in the Brahmaputra valley except Goalpara. Thus a division was made between Assamese and Bengali communities through segregated schools.⁴⁹ After the establishment of a Government aided Bengali High School at Gauhati in 1935,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ A.Guha.*op.cit.*,p.213

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.257

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*p.214

Rohini Kumar Choudhury remarked that “the seeds of poisonous tree which will ever disunite the Bengalese and Assamese were sown with their blessings.”⁵⁰

In the later period the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee also took up the issues of local and communal interest. Refusal to settle wasteland with post-1937 immigrants, separation of Sylhet from Assam, reservation of all government jobs for local domicile inhabitants and the promotion of Assamese as the medium of instructions in all schools were the main matter of policies of the Assam Pradesh Congress party in the pre-independent era.⁵¹

The issue of transfer of Sylhet became all the more important with the coming of Cabinet Mission to India in April, 1946. Andrew Clow, the Governor of Assam appeared before the Mission on March 1946 to explain them of the situation in Assam. He informed that Assam always had a distinct identity and it must be retained in the Constitution of India in the form of a separate state. At the same time he recommended for separation of Sylhet from Assam.⁵² Gopinath Bordoloi in reply to a question to Lord Wavell in April, 1946, pointed out that at the time of British annexation of Assam the district of Sylhet was a part of Bengal. In 1901 there were only 7% of Muslims in the population of Brahmaputra valley excluding Sylhet. The joining of Assam with Bengal in 1905 led to a large infiltration of Muslims with the result that the Muslim population had grown from 3 Lakhs to 13 Lakhs in the Assam valley proper. Bardoloi claimed that the Muslim population in Assam including Sylhet would be 33 % and it was preposterous for Jinnah to say that the whole province should be included in Pakistan. Moreover, the Congress would not object to the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal as its people and culture were predominantly Bengali. It was a deficit district which had to be maintained by the people of Assam valley. Again Bardoloi was asked by the Secretary of State that if there was to be a Pakistan region and Sylhet was tagged with Eastern Bengal, whether remaining part of Assam could unite together with the main part of

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

⁵¹ Dhar. *Op.cit.*, p.154

⁵² S.Nag.*op.cit.*,p.152

India. Bardoloi replied that the loss of Sylhet would make not much difference to communicate between Assam and the rest of India.⁵³

On the other hand, Saadulla also met the delegation and tried to prove that Assam was a Muslim majority province and insisted that not only Sylhet but the whole of Assam should be transferred to Pakistan.⁵⁴ According to him, Assam had no High Court, University, Medical or Veterinary College of its own and was largely depended on Bengali for many of its civilized amenities. Moreover, if Assam became a self-governing unit, they would have to maintain a considerable police force to protect themselves against raids from the hill tribes. It would be a burden which the Province would not be unable to bear on its own. Therefore, Assam would have to attach itself to Bengal which was predominantly a Muslim area.⁵⁵

After failing to arrive at any solution the Cabinet mission proposed for dividing the country into three groups termed as A, B, C. According to it, Group 'A' was to comprise of Madras, Bombay, U.P, Bihar, the Central provinces and Orissa, while Group 'B' was to comprise of Punjab, Sind, NWFP and British Baluchistan and Group 'C' was to consist of Bengal and Assam. The grouping of Bengal and Assam together was considered by the Assamese people as a denial of Provincial status of Assam and destructive of the socio cultural life of the Assamese people. They also thought that the Group formula would result in the total domination of the Assamese by the Bengalese.⁵⁶

The Assamese people were told that it was a deep rooted conspiracy and were asked to oppose determinedly the Group plan to save their nation. It created a panic among the Assamese Hindus. They protested against Saadulla's view for calling the province as Muslim majority one. According to them, if Sylhet were excluded from Assam the Muslim percentage in the Province would fall from 34% to 20%.⁵⁷ Meanwhile

⁵³ASF No.168, 1942-47 Vol.VII (NAI).p.22

⁵⁴ S.Nag.*op.cit.*,p.152

⁵⁵ASF No.168, 1942-47 Vol.VII (NAI).p.25

⁵⁶S.Nag.*op.cit.*,p.152

⁵⁷BimalJ.Dev and Dilipk.Lahiri, *op.cit.*, p.83

the All Assam Students Union organized meetings at Gauhati, Sibsagar and Golaghat from 24 to 27 May, 1946. The Assam Jatiya Mahsabha also asked the people to foil any attempt to transfer Assam to Bengal. The Assamese newspapers interpreted it a move to push Assam into a Muslim zone. In spite of Muslim League effort, the Congress was successful in pushing a resolution which opposes Assam's inclusion in Grouping plan and seeking maintenance of its provincial status. The anti-grouping agitation ended with the announcement of Sylhet referendum.⁵⁸

Initially the Muslim League was inclined to accept the Grouping plan but later on July, 1946 they reversed in earlier decision to accept Cabinet Mission Plan and decided to chalk out a program of direct action to achieve Pakistan. Meanwhile, the immigrants started becoming militant under the leadership of Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani⁵⁹. On 26th June, 1946 they demonstrated the strength of the Muslim League when fifteen thousand immigrants gathered in Mongoldoi and held a meeting at coronation field. Maulana Bhasani delivered a provocative speech there.

The direct action day was observed on 16th August, 1946 in different parts of Assam especially in the immigrant dominated areas. During that time no communal outburst was reported in the Brahmaputra valley. However, certain minor occurrences were reported in Sylhet. Meanwhile, the events in Calcutta had created considerable apprehension in the minds of Hindu people in the Brahmaputra valley. It strained the relations between Hindus and Muslims. The Government of Assam decided to go ahead with the formation of peace committees composed of men of goodwill from all sections. The Government moreover imposed Section 144 Cr. P.C in Sylhet, Habiganj, Dhubri, Mongoldoi, Nowgong to avoid communal tensions.⁶⁰

The political situation in Assam became further complicated when the Government of Assam decided to resume eviction from end of November, 1946. The Chief Minister of Bengal H.S Suhrawardy sent a telegraphic message to Bardoloi to

⁵⁸ S.Nag.*op.cit.*,p.153

⁵⁹BimalJ.Dev and Dilip K.Lahirip.*op.cit.*,85

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*p.87

hold up resumption of the eviction programme. Mahmud Ali, the General Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League also threatened that Assam had so far been free from communal disturbances, but the resumption of evictions might bound to serve as a signal of troubles throughout the province. In a separate statement Abdul Matin Choudhury, a member of the Committee of Action, All India Muslim League declared that eviction would disturb the peace of Assam.⁶¹

The seriousness of the situation did not escape the notice of the Governor. He sent a telegram to the Viceroy in November, 1946 by which he informed that in spite of many attempts to dissuade them, the Assam Government was determined to resume their programme of eviction of Bengali Muslims from the Assam valley. On receipt of the telegram, G.E Abel, Private Secretary to Viceroy, wrote to Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel that there might be retaliatory attacks on the Surma valley Hindus.⁶²

E. J. Beveridge, Assistant Director, also informed the Home Department that he also came to know from a reliable source that if evictions were started against Muslim immigrants in the Assam valley, the Muslims of the Surma Valley would start trouble. The Hindus of the Surma valley became frightened of a Muslim backlash. A Hindu Mahasabha leader in a meeting in Habiganj asked the Hindus to help fellow community members in the regions where they were in a minority.⁶³

Sarder Patel replied to the Abel that after discussing with the Viceroy he had enquired into the matter of evictions by the Assam Government. The Viceroy himself had admitted the illegal nature of the immigrants in their zeal to occupy lands in Assam. Patel therefore thought that the action of the Congress ministry in Assam would be in defence of Government's lawful action. It would not be justifiable to overrule the ministry from taking lawful action. In case of any retaliation in Surma Valley he asserted that the Ministry would have to take strong measures and the Centre would support it.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.89

⁶² M.Kar.*op.cit.*, p.93

⁶³ ASF File No.119/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI p.3

⁶⁴ M.Kar.*op.cit.*, p.94

Meanwhile, on 15th November, 1946 Gopinath Bardoloi informed Sardar Patel through a telegram, followed by a letter that thousands of Muslim immigrants were coming by boats and trains and trying to occupy Government reserve lands marked for planned settlement. It made orderly settlement by the Government impossible. He also complained that propaganda raised for stopping eviction policy on the ground of communal tension was only to make position difficult for the Government. Though he admitted that there was apprehension of communal tension, but Government under no circumstances would submit to illegal and forcible mass occupation of land. Finally, he asserted that he was ready for peaceful solution of the problem.⁶⁵

Sardar Patel informed Abel on 16th November, 1946 enclosing Bardoloi's view and asked him to approach the Muslim League leaders at the Centre to dissuade their followers in Assam from the forcible occupation of reserve lands. However, there was no response from the side of Muslim League.⁶⁶

In the meantime, Bardoloi wrote a letter to Saadulla expressing his eagerness to negotiate, provided encroachers, who re-encroached upon the reserves from where they were earlier evicted, should evacuate voluntarily and peacefully. On the other hand, Saadulla's request for suspension of eviction at least for a short period up to January 1947, considering the prevailing tension which with the help of a spark could give rise to a wide spread conflagration in the province.⁶⁷ He also suggested for a review of the whole matter of eviction by a committee of arbitration comprised of Liaquat Ali of Muslim League and Nehru of Congress. However, Bardoloi ruled out the question of arbitration without any representation from Government.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League adopted a resolution requesting Bengal Government to take up the matter with the Government of Assam. A joint Committee of Action was formed with three of its

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.p.95

⁶⁷ M.kar.*op.cit.*,p.95

⁶⁸ BimalJ.Dev and Dilipk.Lahiri, *op.cit.*,.p.90

representatives and Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani as President and Giasuddin Pathan for making the struggle of the Bengali immigrants a success. In the meantime, the Assam Government had resumed the eviction operation and on 19th December, 1946 declared in the Press that their land settlement policy was governed by the July resolution of 1945 and the Government had no intension to deviate from that policy. The Government already promulgated the Maintenance of Public Order Act on 18th November.⁶⁹

P.E.S Finney, a Central Intelligence officer from Shillong, gave an idea of the political situation of Assam in December, 1946. He reported that the eviction continued slowly and steadily. In order to check propoganda against Government which might led to breaches of peace, a few arrests had been made, who were later released on interim bonds. In Mangoldai sub-division the first series of evictions had been completed successfully. As a precautionary measure the entry of the President and Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League was banned in Darrang. The League retaliated with a decision to observe protest throughout Assam on 3rd January, 1947 against latest Congress Government atrocity. The influx of new immigrants were reported have slowed down and many newcomers returned to Bengal having seen no hope for settlement.⁷⁰

Finney also reported that the communal situation was improving but due to arrival of one Major Khurshid Anwar of the All India Muslim National Guard to Assam, the situation worsened. Khurshid delivered most inflammatory speeches and urged the Muslims to raise a National Guard capable of making any sacrifice for Pakistan and strongly oppose Assam Government's policy of evictions.⁷¹

The Working Committee of the All India Muslim League in its meeting on 31st January to 1 February, 1947 again strongly condemned the eviction policy of the Assam Government, which drove the immigrants to wilderness, rendering them homeless and impoverished. They alleged that the government also committed inhuman practice of

⁶⁹ M.Kar.*op.cit.*,p.96

⁷⁰ ASF File No.119/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI.p.9

⁷¹ *Ibid.*p.10

selling by auction the paddy and food crops of the immigrant cultivators, thereby depriving them from their sole means of survival. It exposed the families and children of immigrant cultivators to starvation. The Committee therefore urged upon the Government to reconsider their policy and to allow settlement of government wastelands and excess lands in the Professional Grazing Reserves with those evictees.⁷²

Under the circumstances a joint meeting of the Working Committee of the Bengal and Assam Muslim Leagues was held at Bahadurabad on the Assam Bengal border towards the end of January, 1947. It was presided over by Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. The opinion of the Conference was that eviction was not a communal problem and aimed not against the Muslims only, but constituted a challenge and threat to the Bengali people. According to Bhasani the Government of Assam was trying to hide their anti-Bengali bias by giving it a communal colour.⁷³ The Conference was followed by the formation of a Committee of Action for launching a movement against Assam Government policy. The Committee consisted of all prominent leaders of the province including Saadulla, Abdul Motin Choudhury and Badrul Hussain, of Muslim National Guard, who were authorized to take all necessary steps to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement immediately. But Mahmud Ali, Secretary Assam Provincial Muslim League was not in favour of launching the movement as he thought that the members of the League in Assam were not prepared for the movement to push their cause.⁷⁴

In the meantime, in between 28th February to 5th March, 1947, a series of meetings of Muslim League were held at Barbanda and Mankachar, situated in the Assam-Bengal border in the district of Goalpara. Abul Kashem, an Assam MLA had built an encampment known as 'East Pakistan Killa' there. It was intended to recruit large number of volunteers and trained them in military fashion for directing them in struggle for the achievement of Pakistan. In a series of meetings Maulana Bhasani and Abul Kashem appealed for the enrolment of large number of Muslim National Guards

⁷² M.kar.*op.cit.*,p.97

⁷³BimalJ.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri.*op.cit.*,p.94

⁷⁴ M.Kar. *op.cit* p.97

and to raise fund for their training. The people were asked to make preparations to occupy all vacant lands in Assam and hoist Muslim League flag on all government buildings at Mankachar on 10th March 1947. It was also announced that the Pakistan would be established in Goalpara within a day and Assam within a week.⁷⁵

In the meantime, the Provincial Muslim League Committee which met at Nowgong, decided to launch Civil Dis-obedience movement. It would be inaugurated by the entry of Bhasani to Darrang by violating the ban. Bhasani evaded all police arrangements and intelligence and reached Tezpur Town Hall on 9th March. While he was delivering a speech there in presence of thousands people, he was arrested at Tezpur under the Maintenance of Public Order Act.⁷⁶

Through the mediatory efforts of the Speaker, Saadulla met the members of the Assam Cabinet on 18th March, 1947 and put forward several proposals as a prelude to the launching of Muslim League agitation. It included immediate release of Abdul Hamid Khan and other Muslim League leaders, suspension of eviction operation and acceptance of a principle for providing land to all landless people whether indigenous or immigrants according to their need.⁷⁷ According to Saadulla, those evicted persons who should have been provided under the 1945 Agreement with land of 30 bighas, now should be given 15 bighas and the land thus saved should be distributed among the evicted families, who were not the rightful claimants' of lands under the Agreement of 1945. If the Assam Government become agrees to these proposals, the Muslim League would call off the Civil Disobedience movement and as a party would make no further demands for lands for immigrants.⁷⁸ Bardoloi had informed Saadulla that there could be no question of granting any more land beyond the scope of the agreement and that so

⁷⁵ ASF File No.119/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI.p.19

⁷⁶ M.Kar *op.cit.*p.98

⁷⁷BimalJ.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri. *op.cit* p.98

⁷⁸ ASF File No.119/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI.p.29

long as the Civil Disobedience continued the Government would not negotiate with the Muslim League on any issue.⁷⁹

In the meantime, Bardoloi had informed Bengal Premier H.S. Surawardy conveying him of the development on the border and requesting him to prevent the Bengal National Guards from entering Assam. Surhawardy did not reply. Being alarmed on the tense situation; Bardoloi informed Sardar Patel and Lord Wavell on 19th March, 1947 that Assam Muslim League and Bengal Muslim leaders were planning for invasion of Assam by organizing volunteers from Bengal. Since 20th February large concentration of men in Bengal border had been reported near Dhubri subdivision with spears and *lathis* and many predominantly Muslim areas had already been infiltrated. Bardoloi requested the Centre to dispatch at least one brigade of army considering the situation in Assam. He also informed that the Muslim League workers were busy in exciting people for violence and creating disaffection against the Government. The League had already declared Civil Disobedience and was having frequent procession which might lead to clashes.⁸⁰

Sardar Patel wrote to Baldev Singh, Defence Member on 20th March, 1947 that the situation of Assam was quite critical as there was a definite attempt on the part of Muslim League, both in Assam and Bengal to compel the government of Assam by force to yield to the League's unlawful demands on the question on eviction. He also recommended strengthening of the military forces in Assam. Accordingly, on 29th March, the Central Government had asked the Eastern Command to place troops at Assam Governments' disposal.⁸¹

However, the Centre's commitment for military aid was to extend in cases when civil forces were unable to cope with the situation, whether it arose out of the eviction policy or any other matters. Moreover, Bardoloi felt encouraged when Patel advised him

⁷⁹ M.Kar. *op.cit* p.104

⁸⁰ Bimal J. Dev and Dilip K. Lahiri. *op.cit* p.98

⁸¹ M.Kar. *op.cit*.p.99

not to surrender an inch of land to the illegal immigrants in Assam and stand solidly on the policy which he was implementing.⁸²

Meanwhile on 26th March, 1947, Basanat Kumar Das introduced the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Bill, 1947, to regularize the Ordinance which was issued on November, 1946. The Bill was passed without any amendment or Muslim League opposition as they had already withdrawn from the House in protest against Bhasani's arrest.⁸³

At this stage, the internal conflict between the League Parliamentary wing led by Saadulla and League Organization led by Mahmud Ali appeared. However, Choudhury Khaliqzaman and Habibulla Bahar intervened in the matter and a meeting of Muslim League was convened at Shillong on 30th March, 1947. In that meeting it was resolved that on account of arrest of Muslim League leaders and firing on unarmed Muslim immigrants resulting into death of 12 immigrants, a peaceful non-violent and non-communal mass Civil Disobedience Movement to be started on a wide scale to overthrow the Bardoloi Ministry.⁸⁴ After the meeting Khaliqzaman declared that the Civil Disobedience movement had begun and asked the League supporters to fill the jails of Bardoloi Government.⁸⁵

Here it should be mentioned that Saadulla and other Assamese Muslim leaders did not favour extreme action but was ready to go jail if the All India Muslim League gave its consent in favour of the movement.⁸⁶ The Civil Disobedience movement, meantime, grew in intensity in the lower Assam Valley. There had been some minor incidents, but the most serious one was the attack on Mankachar Police station near the Bengal border. It was beaten off by the Police stationed there. That incident on Police station was probably instigated from across the Bengal border. Huge meetings were

⁸²BimalJ.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri. *op.cit.*p.99

⁸³ M.Kar. *op.cit.*p.100

⁸⁴*Ibid.*p.101

⁸⁵BimalJ.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri. *op.cit.*p.99

⁸⁶ ASF File No.119/46-Poll (I), Home Dept. NAI.p.27

constantly being held just across the border where inflammatory speeches were delivered by the leaders. On the other hand Hindus were organizing Seva Dals under the support of Congress and Azad Hind Dals under the Forward Bloc. The Government was taking all possible steps to deal with the situation and considerable tact and restraint were displayed by the Police and Magistrate to save the situation from deteriorating into bloodshed.⁸⁷

The Revenue Minister of Assam, Bishnuram Medhi had to face hostile Muslim League demonstrations while touring Sylhet in the month of April. At Habiganj an effigy of the Assam Premier was beaten and at Maulavi bazar stones were pelted on the car of the Revenue Minister. At Sylhet, the slogans shouted by the Muslim League were- “*Cholo-Cholo-Darrang Cholo*”, “*Cholo-Cholo- Jelle Cholo*” “*Pakistan Kaim Koro*”, which gave clear indication of the movement which was due to eviction policy of the Assam Government.⁸⁸

The Muslim League activities in Goalpara district were beginning to be intense on account of arrest of Khairat Hussain MLA of Rongpur (Bengal) at Mankachar on the 6th April, 1947. He was arrested for leading a procession in defiance of orders issued under section 144 Cr.P.C. ⁸⁹ Besides, The Assam Police seized certain important documents from a member of the Muslim National Guard who was acting as a messenger and carrying sealed papers from Mankachar to Shillong. At the same time the activities of Abul Kashem also attracted the attention of the Assam government. He claimed that in view of the need of the country at that juncture, and in pursuance of the resolution of the Joint Committee at Bahadurabadhe had started that ‘*killla*’ in the name of Almightly. Further, Giasuddin Pathan, Secretary Joint Action Committee along with two other prominent League leaders visited the place and addressed huge gatherings. Kashem declared that he was in a position to send at least 10,000 persons to court arrest from that *killla*. He also emphasized that he was in favour of a guarilla fight especially

⁸⁷ *Ibid*.p.31

⁸⁸ *Ibid*.p.32

⁸⁹ *Ibid*.p.33

due to the presence of garo hill areas. To divert the attention of the Government he wanted to open another base.⁹⁰

Towards the end of April a solution of the problem was attempted but it failed. The Governor Akbar Hydari suggested for settlement of immigrants in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. But Bardoloi was convinced that such an attempt would encourage the Muslim League to create more disorder and lawlessness in the province. The Muslim League had already circulated that the appointment of Akbar Hydari was made with the intention to convert Assam into Pakistan. The cabinet colleagues of Bardoloi, J.J.M Nichols Roy and Basanta Das were also opposed Akbar Hydari's plan. Sir Benegal Narsing Rau, I.C.S who had been the Secretary to the Government of Assam for several years during Saadulla ministries met Saadulla to find any solution of the immigrant problem of Assam. The Committee of Action permitted Saadulla to carry on the discussion on the basis of the demands of the Muslim League. In the meantime the agitation had become intense in Sylhet and Cachar. In defiance of the prohibitory orders, meetings and processions became widespread. The Assam Government retaliated by arresting a number of Muslim League leaders including Moinul Haque Choudhury of Silchar, A. Latif and Jalaluddin Ahmed Choudhury of Karimganj and Baris of Sylhet. In Police firing a volunteer named Aklas was killed in Sylhet. Under such atmosphere the negotiation between Saadulla and B.N Rau failed. The Assam Provincial Muslim League Committee complained that there was no change of heart on the part of the Government as police firing was resorted to without the slightest justification. It caused deaths of innocent and unarmed peaceful demonstrators at Mankachar and Sylhet. Therefore there was no point of carrying out the negotiations with the Assam Government.⁹¹

Saadulla as the Chairman of Action Committee sent a six point directive to different District Committees of Action to carry out the Civil Disobedience Movement vigorously. But it was too late for Saadulla as the Assam government had already taken

⁹⁰ M.Kar. *op.cit.*p.103

⁹¹Bimal J.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri. *op.cit.*p.101

tough stand to deal with the movement. That was followed by the surrender of Abul Kashim on 4th May, 1947 who had absconded for quite a long period in places around the borderland of Assam.⁹²

The announcement of the Mountbatten Plan on 3rd June, 1947 forced the Provincial League to accept the fait accompli. It prescribed the partition of India conceding Pakistan and referendum in Sylhet district of Assam. On 11th June, 1947 the Civil Dis-obedience Movement was withdrawn by the Provincial Muslim League and Bhasani was released from Jorhat jail on 20th June, 1947. In the referendum which was held on 7th July, 1947, Muslim League demonstrated its strength and won the case by a margin of 55,578 votes. The Surma valley Hindus fought a lost battle for retention of Sylhet in Assam and Sylhet was included in Eastern Pakistan.⁹³

Thus the 'Line System', a devise introduced by the colonial Government to control immigrant settlers from Bengal to the wasteland of Assam resulted into division of India and Indians in the name of community, religion and culture. Thus the colonial rulers were successful with the help of their policy of 'divide and rule' to sow the seeds of hostility between the Hindus and the Muslims, as well as Bengali and Assamese, which hampered the progress in all directions even after the independence.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.102

⁹³ M.Kar. *op.cit* p.136